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ABSTRACT

Part 3 of this five part project asks students of the Tasmanian region of Australia to explore the history of Port Arthur, a 19th century penal colony located in Tasmania. The project is based on three ideas: (1) studying history can be educational and enjoyable; (2) imagination is an essential part of studying history; and (3) history is most of all a means by which to seek to understand the present--one's self and society as it exists now. Part 3 of the project provides historical background on Port Arthur. There are ten sections: (1) British society and transportation; (2) crimes and penalties 1800-1835; (3) Port Arthur--a description; (4) controlling the convicts; (5) punishment and penitence; (6) religion; (7) industry; (8) escape; (9) private lives; and (10) health, sickness, and death. (DB)

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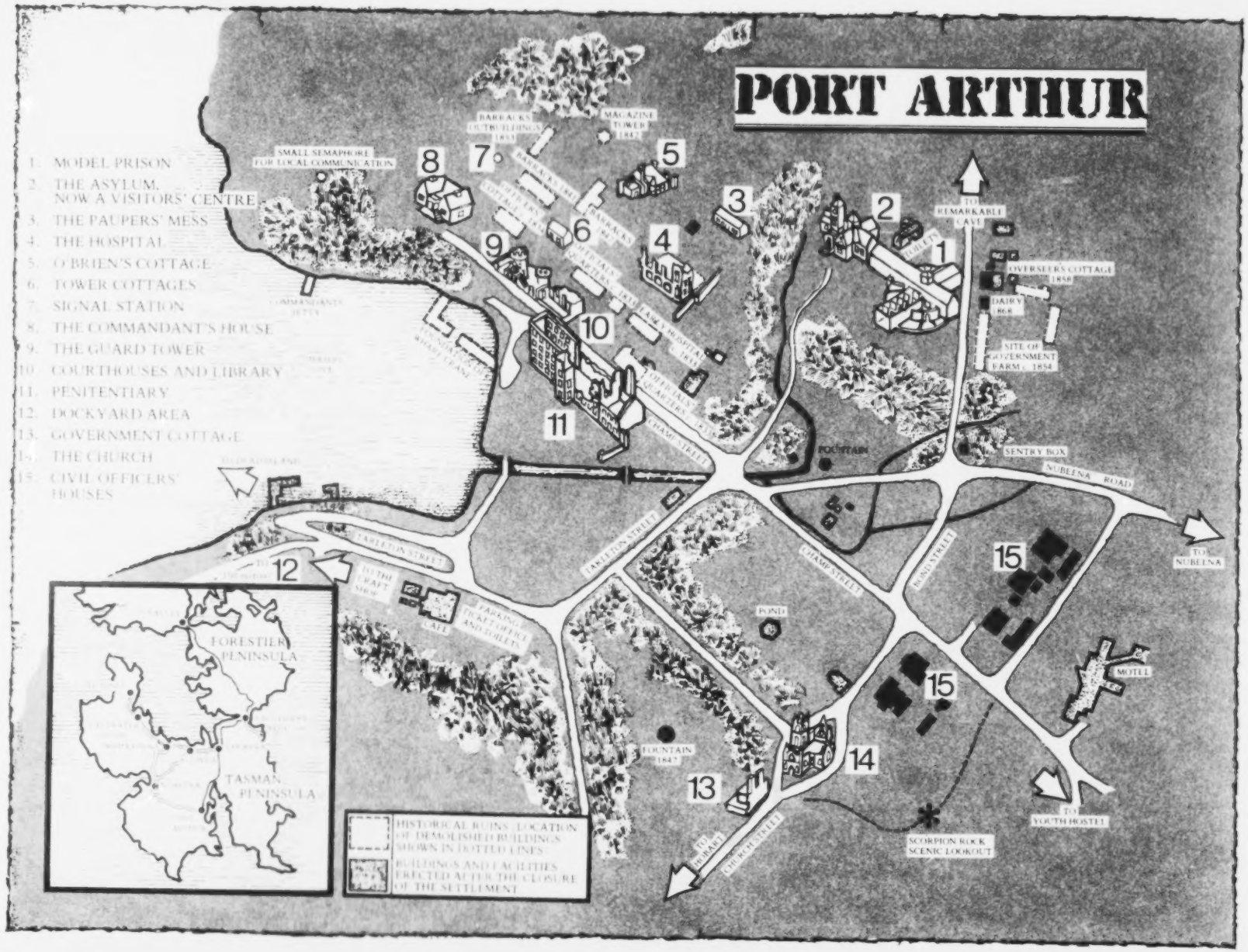
3 BACKGROUND


PORT ARTHUR
1. MODEL PRISON
2. THE ASYLUM, NOW A VISITORS' CENTRE
3. THE PAUPERS' MESS
4. THE HOSPITAL
5. O'BRIEN'S COTTAGE
6. TOWER COTTAGES
7. SIGNAL STATION
8. THE COMMANDANT'S HOUSE
9. THE GUARD TOWER
10. COURTHOUSES AND LIBRARY
11. PENITENTIARY
12. DOCKYARD AREA
13. GOVERNMENT COTTAGE
14. THE CHURCH
15. CIVIL OFFICERS' HOUSES
SMALL SEMAPHORE FOR LOCAL COMMUNICATION
BARRACKS OUTBUILDINGS 1833
MAGAZINE TOWER 1842
TO REMARKABLE CAVE
OVERSEER'S COTTAGE 1858
DAIRY 1868
SITE OF GOVERNMENT FARM c. 1854
SENTRY BOX
NUBEENA ROAD
TO NUBEENA
FOUNTAIN
CHAPEL STREET
BROAD STREET
POND
MOTEL
FOUNTAIN 1847
TO YOUTH HOSTEL
SCORPION ROCK SCENIC LOOKOUT
TO THE WHARF
CHURCH STREET
TASMAN HIGHWAY
TO THE CRAFT SHOP
CAFE
CARPARK, TICKET OFFICE AND TOILETS
FORESTIER PENINSULA
TASMAN PENINSULA
HISTORICAL RUINS - LOCATION OF DEMOLISHED BUILDINGS SHOWN IN DOTTED LINES
BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES ERECTED AFTER THE CLOSURE OF THE SETTLEMENT

PORT ARTHUR ALIVE

EXPLORING PAST AND PRESENT

3 BACKGROUND

A JOINT PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
AND THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF TASMANIA

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Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart—p.13, photo of Port Arthur guards by Alfred Bock, c1860;
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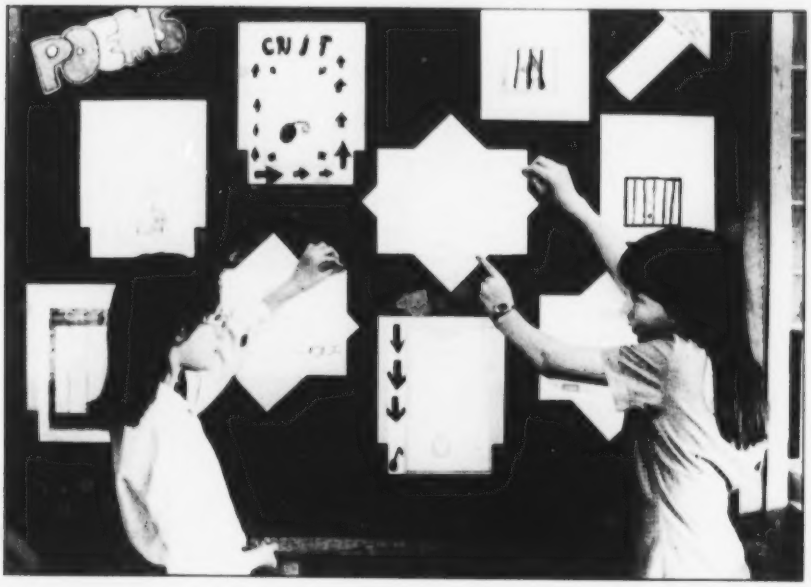

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BACKGROUND

1

British society and transportation

A time of turmoil

The late 18th century—the period in which Australia was first colonised—was a time of political and social turmoil for Europeans everywhere. While the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789–1795) shook the world, profound social changes were occurring in Britain.

The money-makers

By 1800, capitalists—people who accumulate wealth and spend it on business enterprises—dominated the British economy. Capitalism had begun to develop about 1700 when wealthy landowners used their political power to increase their estates by taking over and fencing off land which until then had been common—that is, owned and used by all people. The money they made from their bigger estates they often invested in industry and commerce: in mines and factories, roads and canals (and later railways), ships and warehouses. Some of them put money into the slave trade from Africa to America, usually making big profits. Others invested in 'manufactories' (factories) and in new machinery to make them more efficient.

Suffering

As some people accumulated property and wealth, others suffered. Country people, who were unable to compete, lost their incomes from farming or home industry, and sought employment in the factories of cities like Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham and Glasgow, or in the commercial centres of London, Liverpool and Bristol. From the 1750s, cities grew more and more quickly. Parts of them became slums, where people lived in appalling conditions. Outsiders rarely visited these slums. Employed people worked in factories for up to sixteen hours a day. Unemployed people often finished up in 'poor-houses' that differed little from prisons and where they were forced to labour for their food and shelter.

New penalties

People were forced to change their traditional ways of life and to move to new places, and the gap between rich and poor widened. All of this caused unrest. People with power tried to suppress those below them with new laws against property violations such as theft, trespass and poaching. New laws brought new penalties: prisons and hanging replaced the whip and the stocks, and as prisons quickly filled the authorities looked overseas for places to send convicts fortunate enough to have escaped the noose.

Exporting criminals

Transportation, a system of punishing law-breakers and deterring potential criminals through exile and forced labour in distant places, was used by Britain from the early 1600s. During the 17th century the English colonies in America, mainly Maryland and Virginia, received transported convicts for 'white slave' labour on plantations. By the time the American colonies revolted in 1775, they had become the major receivers of transported British convicts.

Crisis

The British Government, its jails and prison-hulks (moored ships used as floating prisons) filled to overflowing, faced a crisis when transportation to the victorious American colonies was cut off. (One former colony, Georgia, did continue to take a few for a time.) The British Empire offered many alternatives, such as the West Indies, Canada, the African colonies and India, but there was opposition to all of them.

The Australian plan

The newly charted East Coast of Australia (then known as New Holland) had potential: there were no European settlers there who might oppose a convict colony, the climate was moderate and escape was very difficult. The colony might one day have economic or strategic value, but in 1786, when the decision was made, that would have been an afterthought. In May 1787 the First Fleet left Portsmouth for Botany Bay carrying 1483 people, 759 of them convicts. The Port Jackson settlement was established in January 1788.

Struggle for survival

The convicts continued to arrive in the 1790s, often facing near-starvation in the struggling colony. In 1803 Britain established a second colony on the banks of the Derwent River in Tasmania (then Van Diemen's Land). It grew into Australia's major penal colony, receiving the worst of Britain's felons. To accommodate 'the worst of the worst', Macquarie Harbour on the wild West Coast became the world's most isolated penal settlement in 1822, and Maria Island was made another prison in 1825. Both in the Colonies and in Britain, Macquarie Harbour, like Port Arthur in later years, was deliberately publicised as a 'hell on earth' in order to try and deter crime.

Access around the South-West Coast to Macquarie Harbour was very difficult. Escapes from Maria Island happened all too frequently. In 1832–33 both places were abandoned in favour of the newly established timber station of Port Arthur.

LOOKING FURTHER: See **Background 2** for a list of crimes punishable by transportation in the early 19th century. **Eyewitness 2** contains convicts' accounts of travel by sea.

BACKGROUND

2

Crimes and penalties 1800–1835

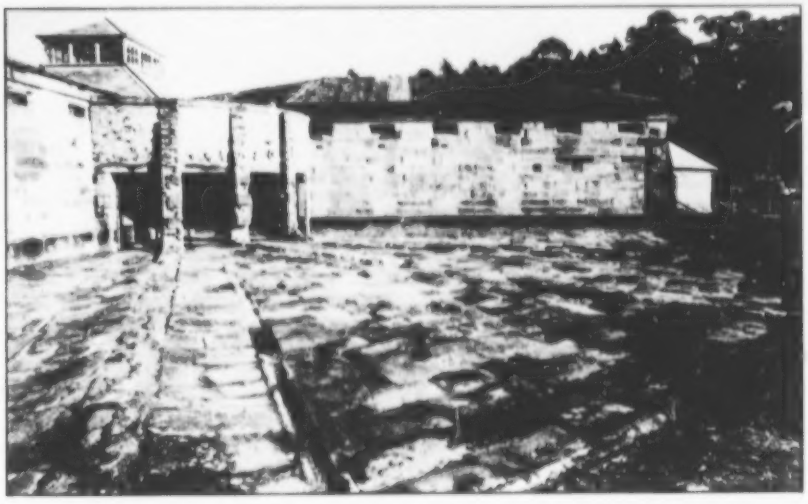
Capital crimes

Punishable by death, but in ninety per cent of cases this was reduced to transportation or imprisonment.

Treason or petty treason
Mutiny or desertion by sailors or soldiers
Highway or mail robbery
Armed smuggling
Piracy or destroying ships
Murder
Arson
Rape or sodomy
Counterfeiting gold or silver coin
Forging or stealing of banknotes or other financial or legal documents.
Uttering* of above (second offences)
Stealing an heiress
Stealing goods worth over five pounds [$1500–$2000†]
Picking pockets or shoplifting of goods worth over five shillings [$75–$100†]
Stealing or destroying linen at bleaching grounds or woollen cloth at tenter grounds
Stealing horses, cattle or sheep
Stealing from government stores or ships in distress
Stealing deer (second offence)
Stealing by servant of master's goods worth over two pounds [$600–$700]
Burglary or house-breaking
Malicious maiming or killing of cattle
Pulling down houses or churches
Breaking down head of fish pond to cause loss of fish
Cutting down avenue of garden trees, or hop binds
Setting fire to coal mines
Taking reward from theft
Returning from transportation overseas
Malicious maiming, or stabbing an unarmed person causing death
Concealing death of bastard child
Sending threatening letters

The material in this section is taken from *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* by Patrick Colquhoun (7th edn, London, 1806, as quoted in A.G.L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies*, Faber, London, 1966). In 1835, the reforming Whig Government drastically reduced the number of capital crimes and made imprisonment an alternative to transportation.

Failing to disperse one hour after reading of Riot Act
Being an accessory to capital offences
Destroying goods in dockyards
Challenging over twenty jurors in capital felonies
Selling cottons with forged stamps
Destroying silk, velvet or woollen goods or textile-making tools
Using false name to courts of law
Escaping from prison
Attempting to kill Privy Councillors
Sacrilege
Enlisting into foreign service
Destroying turnpikes, bridges, gates, weighing or marsh-draining engines, locks or sluices

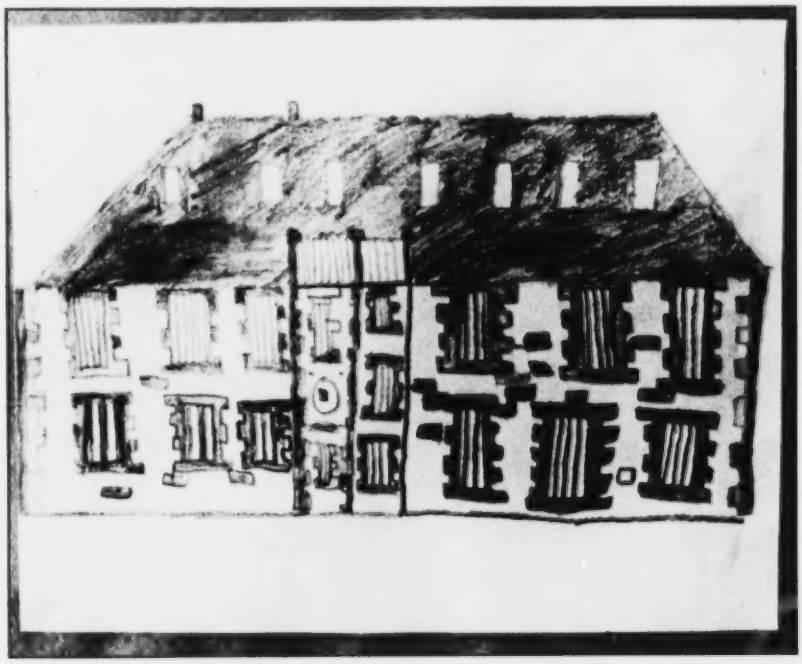


Crimes punishable by transportation

Grand larceny (stealing goods worth over one shilling) [$15–$20†]
Petty larceny (stealing goods worth less than one shilling) [$15–$20†]
Stealing from houses, shops, vessels, churches, booths
Stealing naval stores
Stealing iron, copper, lead or blacklead ore
Stealing or destroying letters
Stealing fish from pond or river
Stealing or destroying roots, trees or plants worth over five shillings [$75–$100†]
Stealing children with their apparel
Stealing shroud out of grave
Receiving or buying stolen goods
Maliciously shooting at a person
Sending threatening letters
Cutting down river banks
Assaulting revenue officers
Assaulting with intent to rob
Setting fire to underwood
Fishing in private ponds
Bigamy
Secretly marrying
Manslaughter

12

Cutting or burning clothes
Counterfeiting copper coin
Returning to kingdom after deportation as alien
Carrying too many passengers on public transport



Misdemeanors

Punishable by whipping, pillory, imprisonment or labour in house of correction

Stealing dead bodies
Stealing growing cabbages or turnips
Stealing deer or dogs
Stealing from orchards
Stealing or cutting wood and trees worth less than five shillings
Perjury
Fraud or conspiracy to defraud
Assault
Firing house to defraud insurance
Selling fireworks
Uttering• base money
Defrauding customs and excise
Conspiring to raise wages
Keeping a bawdy house

• Putting into circulation.

† Rule of thumb for converting sums to an equivalent amount of dollars in today's terms: multiply shillings by fifteen; multiply pounds by 300. This gives an approximate equivalence, based on the tradesman's wage of six shillings per day in the early 1800s.

BACKGROUND

3

Port Arthur—a description

What was Port Arthur like during its period of greatest growth and activity as a convict settlement? Who lived there and what did it look like?

The people

In 1840 the settlement was experiencing many changes and about to begin a new period as administrative centre of a number of probation stations around the Peninsula. The Peninsula's population at that time totalled 1495 convicts and 204 'free' people, most of whom lived at Port Arthur or Point Puer, the boys' settlement, and the remainder were at Eaglehawk Neck or the Coal Mines. There were 147 in the military establishment, including eleven wives and seventeen children. Non-military officials and their families comprised thirty-two males and twenty-five females. Among the convicts were five women, assigned to officials as domestic servants. In the next five years the number of convicts and free people on the Peninsula would expand greatly because of the opening up of new 'probation stations'.

A wooden town

The appearance of the settlement in 1840 was very different from what it is today. There was no penitentiary, separate prison, asylum, paupers'

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mess or hospital. The large military barracks, demolished in 1880, had not yet been built. Most of the buildings you see today are brick; in 1840 timber was the main building material. From the crude split timber huts of the early 1830s, a sizeable settlement had emerged but there were no lawns. Wooden fences criss-crossed open spaces and divided up the land for farming, gardening, industrial use, recreation and so forth.

Vanished buildings

The Church and Guard Tower, massive and solid in hewn stone, overlooked a settlement built mainly of timber huts. The Shipwright's House, amongst other timber dockyard buildings, looked out across Mason's Cove to the Commandant's House. To the west of that building, around and behind the Guard Tower, were the military officers' quarters, the civil officers' quarters, administrative offices, and hospital and soldiers' barracks. Today almost nothing remains of those wooden buildings. On the waterfront were large timber store sheds (ordnance and commissariat stores). Further west (towards the Church) were wooden convict workshops on land reclaimed during the 1830s. Behind them were the prisoners' barracks where convicts slept. Even then the prisoners' quarters badly needed repair or replacement.

Change

In the 1840s Port Arthur changed greatly. Brick became the predominant building material as the brick-making industry went into full production. The Granary (later enlarged to be converted to a penitentiary), the new Hospital, and the Military Barracks on the high land above the Guard Tower were all built about this time. The last big stone building, the separate prison, was completed in the early 1850s. And throughout the settlement, but particularly at the western end of Champ Street near the Church, new brick homes—from tiny cottages to large residences—were built to house free officials and their families and servants, as well as a few convicts with special privileges. All these people had lived in low-standard wooden houses or huts until then.

Schooling

Children of free settlers were given lessons in a number of different buildings during the convict settlement's history. During the 1830s the school was a timber hut next to the original prisoners' barracks (between Champ Street and the ruins of the paupers' mess). In the 1840s a brick building above the Guard Tower was used. Convict boys after 1834 received their schooling at Point Puer.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 4** has descriptions of life in early Port Arthur. **Background 4** describes the assignment and probation systems and the way Port Arthur was administered. **Background 9** and **Eyewitness 16** are about the way Port Arthur's non-convict population lived, and **Eyewitness 7** tells of contact between convicts and free persons.

Controlling the convicts

The penal systems of Van Diemen's Land

Over 60,000 convicts are estimated to have been transported to Van Diemen's Land up to 1853, when the last consignment of transportees arrived at Hobart Town.

Assignment

Early in the Colony's history, convicts on their arrival were usually put to work on public projects such as building roads, bridges or public offices. Under William Sorell, who was Lieutenant-Governor from 1817 to 1824, a system of assigning convicts to work for private settlers—the Assignment System—was developed. Assigned convicts worked for no wages, just food and lodgings, and could be punished with the lash or hard labour in chains if a master complained. Assigned convicts who managed to avoid a master's wrath for a minimum of three years could apply for a ticket-of-leave, enabling them to serve out their sentences in relative freedom so long as they did not attempt to leave the Colony. By the 1820s most of the Colony's convicts were working for private masters.

Arthur's reforms

The 'system' was riddled with corruption and abuse. Then in the mid-1820s, Lt-Governor George Arthur introduced regulations to account for and control convicts and to reorganise the Colony's police system. Van Diemen's Land was divided into nine districts, each with a police magistrate in charge and its own police force consisting of a chief constable, divisional constables, constables and military detachments. All district activities, including local punishment of minor offences, had to be rigorously reported to the chief police magistrate in Hobart Town. His assistant, the muster master, supervised and recorded in small detail the arrival and movements of all convicts. The worst convicts were sent to penal settlements: at Sarah Island in Macquarie Harbour (1821–1833), Maria Island (1825–1832) and Port Arthur from 1830.

Arthur's convict system had seven classes: the best-behaved were in class 1 and the worst in class 7. Only convicts in the bottom two levels went to penal settlements. So only a minority of Van Diemen's Land convicts went to Port Arthur.

Probation and out-stations

In 1840 Sir John Franklin's administration introduced a new system, in which small penal settlements were established in virgin areas to help open up the Colony and provide new means of reform and discipline. Prisoners at these 'probation stations' could, after a trouble-free period, earn a probation pass entitling them to receive wages paid into a bank account, to be used by the convict when he finally obtained a ticket-of-leave.

So in addition to the earlier settlements at the Coal Mines (1833) and Point Puer (1834), Port Arthur now administered convict out-stations at Cascades (now Koonya), Impression Bay (now Premaydena), Saltwater

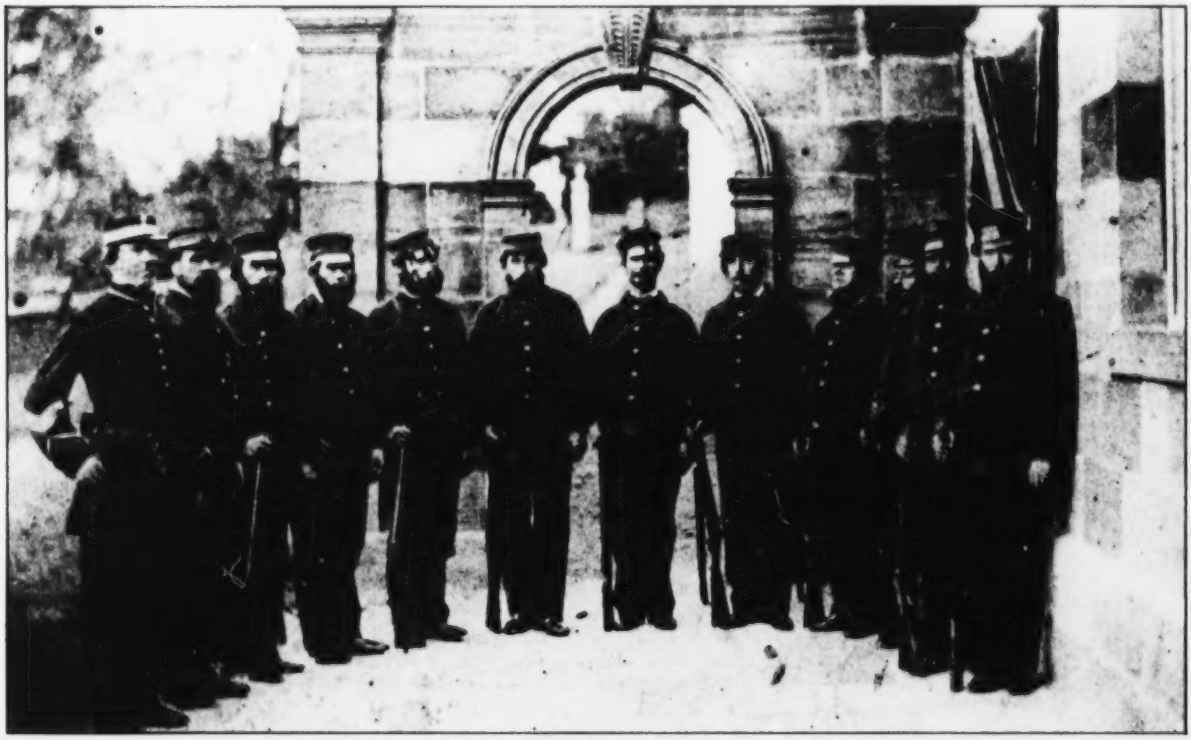
River, Flinders Bay on Forestier Peninsula, Slopen Island and Wedge Bay (near Nubeena).

Keeping order at Port Arthur

Port Arthur was run by a combination of two normally separate organisations, the military and the civil service, under a Commandant. The early Commandants were mostly military men employed as civil servants. The most prominent was Captain Charles O'Hara Booth, Commandant from 1833 to 1844. Booth was energetic and well organised, and quickly devised administrative controls that kept the settlement running smoothly for many years. As well, he introduced a semaphore signalling system (passing messages around the Peninsula and to Hobart using hilltop masts with movable arms) and Australia's first railway: convict-propelled wagons on wooden rails running from Norfolk Bay (Taranna) to Long Bay (Oakwood, near Port Arthur).

Civil and military

Basically, the civil administration on the Peninsula managed the settlements, transport and communications, planned convict work, maintained supplies, kept records, investigated misconduct, and provided religious guidance and education. Using convict overseers they also supervised convicts at work. The military officers and soldiers provided protection against convict rebellion, gave engineering advice, provided supervision, guarded against escape, and provided manpower in searches for absconders.



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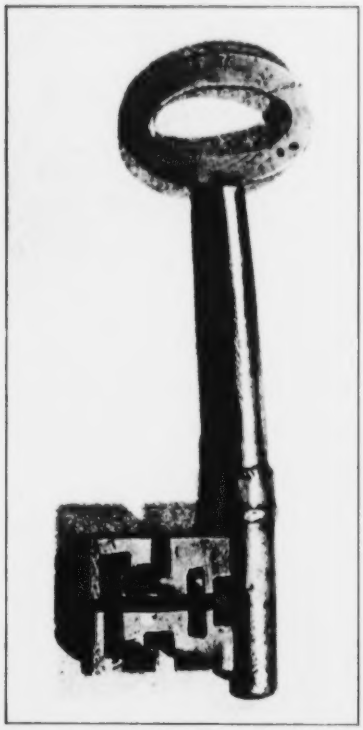
Civil officers included a visiting magistrate, a religious instructor or chaplain, a store supervisor or commissariat officer such as Thomas Lempriere, a superintendent of convicts such as William Cart, a shipwright, a schoolmaster, a farm overseer, a chief constable and the masters of convict and supply ships. Because free people did not want to work on the Peninsula in lower paid positions, convicts had to be used as overseers of work gangs. They were often brutal and corrupt. On the other hand, convicts with special skills or talents, such as writing or designing, were often of great value to the settlement.

The military role was twofold. From 1837 the Royal Engineers were responsible for preparing plans for and supervising construction of all building works, and became quite powerful in overall penal administration. But the army's major role was in security: soldiers were effectively the settlement's police force. Eaglehawk Neck was manned almost entirely by the army, and there was a large detachment at the Coal Mines. Most work gangs were guarded by the military, which also provided escorts for prisoners being moved between settlements.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 14** contains accounts about keeping prisoners in their place. See **Background 5** and **Eyewitness 5** for information on punishment of convicts, and **Background 8** and **Eyewitness 9** for more about absconding and security. **Eyewitness 17** tells of a soldier's existence on the Peninsula.



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BACKGROUND 5

Punishment and penitence

A turning point

The 19th century was a turning point in the history of crime and punishment. Until late in the 18th century, imprisonment as we know it, with long sentences and separate cells, was virtually unknown in Britain. The lash, the pillory (stocks) and the noose were the commonly known methods of punishment. Prisons existed, but they were usually large open dormitories to which people were rarely sentenced for over a year. They were seen more as sleeping quarters for labour gangs than places of permanent confinement.

The reform idea

The idea of using jails to reform prisoners—allowing them time to ponder on their misdeeds while (preferably) performing useful work—

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was encouraged by the English reformer John Howard. His book, *The State of the Prisons* (1777), radically altered the official attitude to the treatment of criminals and helped to foster the building in England of 'penitentiaries'—reform prisons in which it was intended prisoners would become better as a result of repenting, or doing penitence. But such buildings were costly and scarce around 1800, and many new crimes against property brought greater numbers of prisoners. So other forms of punishment such as the lash and hard labour continued to be used. Harsh punishment, including transportation to the dreaded penal colonies, was also considered necessary as a deterrent, to prevent crime.

Hard labour

Until 1850, Van Diemen's Land, with its infamous reputation in Britain, was an ideal deterrent. But the island was far from ideal for imprisoning people to punish and reform them: it had no large prisons (nor could it afford them) and convict labour was needed in the towns and countryside to develop the Colony's frail economy as quickly as possible. Today Port Arthur is seen to have been a kind of prison, but to the colonial government it was just as important as an industrial centre (see Background 7), and the convicts' unpaid labour was vital. So early administrators tended to punish the convicts through hard labour. This was sometimes routine—most prisoners up to 1850 worked in the punishing timber-carrying gangs for three months after their arrival. But in especially difficult cases (for example, convicts who repeatedly attempted to escape) prisoners could be chained standing in one position while being forced to break stones all day, or chained to a heavy log which they were forced to carry with them when moving about.

The lash

Offences against the settlement's strict regulations (for example, illegally possessing tobacco or rum, hiding clothes or food, insolence or refusing to work) tended in the first ten years to be punished by the lash. Punishment almost always was swift and public. As soon as he was found guilty by the Commandant (who heard minor cases until visiting magistrates were appointed in the early 1840s), a prisoner would be tied to the triangle or whipping frame near the prisoners' barracks and, in full view of his assembled fellow-prisoners, given the number of lashes prescribed for his offence (usually from ten to 100) on his bare back. The punishment was observed by a medical officer who could stop the 'flagellator' (usually another convict) if the prisoner became seriously ill. But the sentence was completed on the prisoner's recovery. About a third of Port Arthur's convicts were punished in this way in the first ten years of settlement, but the use of lashing declined rapidly after 1840.

The separate treatment

The separate prison, or Model Prison, was designed in the 1840s solely to house prisoners in solitary confinement, a punishment intended to replace the lash. Solitary confinement had been used from the beginning at Port Arthur, but not under any reform program or with any regulated code of behaviour. The new prison followed the design of Pentonville Prison, London (1842). Prisoners were to be kept by themselves in separate cells, in which they would perform small, repetitive and productive tasks (at Port Arthur, mostly tailoring and shoemaking), keep their cells spotlessly clean, read the Bible and ponder on their misdeeds. They exercised singly in walled yards each day, and only came together for Sunday services in the chapel, when they wore caps with masks to

prevent contact with other prisoners. Except for praying and singing hymns in the chapel, prisoners were to be kept separate and silent. 'Problem' prisoners could be locked up for two or three weeks in a black, windowless, sound-proofed 'dumb cell' and fed only bread and water; in fact, however, prisoners were usually sentenced to this cell for two days. Prisoners sent to Port Arthur for serious crimes normally underwent a term in the Model Prison on arrival. This term varied from nine months to a year, depending on the original sentence. Otherwise the prison was used for punishment.

Mental punishment

The original English version of the separate prison was meant to be a long-term reform measure for selected prisoners, who stayed there many months. At Port Arthur, where sentences were usually shorter, it served largely as a means of punishment. Its effect was to replace physical punishment (which often had its own damaging effects on prisoners' minds) with purely mental punishment. Eventually, the number of 'lunatics', as mentally ill people were then called, who emerged from the prison caused some medical observers to express concern. A few prisoners were reported to have suffered strange visions and nightmares, and sometimes permanent insanity, and the asylum built next door in 1867 contained some former Model Prison inmates. The prison, however, remained in use from 1849 until Port Arthur was abandoned in 1877.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 5** has accounts of punishment at Port Arthur, and **Eyewitness 3** tells of serious crimes. **Background 2** has a list of crimes punishable by transportation. The convict profiles contain numerous references to punishment and its effects.

The bell tolls
The guard walks past
The hooded masks are handed out
The guard marches the prisoner to the chapel
Into the box and the door slams shut
From now on you're all alone
The preacher stands there like a bird of prey
Commanding the prisoners to repent of their sins
Shouting and singing as loud as you can
The only word I'll say till next week is "Amen."

BACKGROUND

Religion

Reform through God

Instilling or reinforcing a Christian belief was seen as a very important part of the reform process at Port Arthur. No prisoner was considered to be reformed—'cured' of his criminal tendencies—unless he could say that he believed in God's power to save sinners and that he humbly regretted his past misdeeds. The prisoners' crimes were regarded not only as offences against their fellow humans but also as offences against God.

An unpopular job

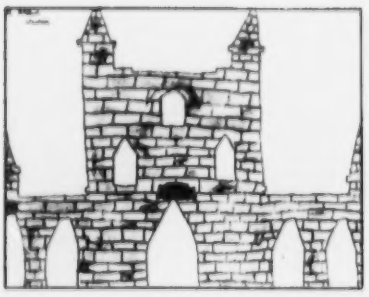
The Chaplain or religious instructor was therefore an essential official appointment at Port Arthur. Because the Church of England was the established (or official) church in the Colony (just as in England), the government sought Anglican clergymen willing to serve at Port Arthur, but could find none. In 1833 it settled for the Wesleyan minister John Allen Manton, who had been at Macquarie Harbour. He served two terms as Chaplain at Port Arthur in the 1830s and 1840s. His salary, like those of his successors William Butters, William Simpson and John Weatherston, was paid partly by the government and partly by the Wesleyan Committee.

The Wesleyans

Wesleyans, or Methodists, were a non-conformist English Protestant sect led by John Wesley. They had broken away from the Church of England, and were closely involved with the political and social reform movements of the early 19th century. Their approach to religion was basic: little ceremony or decoration and a good deal of preaching, Bible-reading and hymn-singing in church, and out of church more personal contact with their 'flock' (in this case, the prisoners).

A chaplain's tasks

Official regulations at Port Arthur required that all prisoners attend religious services or undertake religious instruction on the Sabbath, and that the Chaplain have the full co-operation of all officers in pursuing his religious and reforming aims. This meant that the clergyman could talk with prisoners at work so long as their work was not seriously interrupted. He also attended sick prisoners and those being tried or punished, or waiting to be shipped to Hobart Town to face serious charges like murder—and possible hanging. A catechist, or religious instructor, was in charge of the Christian training of the boys of Point Puer.



Conscientious

The Wesleyan chaplains of the 1830s and 1840s were conscientious in their religious work, often urging official action to deal with prisoners' grievances. They were sometimes involved in disagreements with convict overseers or supervisors who felt that they interfered with the smooth running of the convict system.

The Church

The importance of religion was also illustrated by the building of the Church in 1836–37. (A murder occurred during construction and there were no windows for the first services during the cold winter of 1837.) On completion, the Church was the biggest structure in Port Arthur, far grander than the prisoners' and soldiers' rotting timber barracks. The Church was not consecrated, which meant that all religious denominations could worship in it.

A Catholic Chaplain

In fact, all services in the first years of settlement were conducted by Protestant chaplains under Protestant principles. This met the religious needs of most prisoners (who were Protestant and mostly Church of England), but a large Catholic group resented being forced to worship as Protestants. In 1843 they rebelled, refusing to enter the Church. About the same time an incident at Impression Bay Probation Station sparked off further controversy. A visiting magistrate who opposed Catholic claims ordered that all prisoners—about 500 of them—be forced at bayonet-point to worship together in a hall built to hold 150. The event nearly caused the building to collapse.

The pressure from Catholic prisoners finally forced the government to appoint a Roman Catholic Chaplain at Port Arthur in 1844 and Catholic catechists (religious instructors) at other stations.

Little effect

But despite their efforts, it is unlikely that ministers of religion had much effect on the reform of Port Arthur's prisoners. They were usually well-meaning—and Manton certainly tried harder than most—but were too distant and different from the prisoners to fully understand their needs. Like most 19th-century religious teachers, they tended to preach from on high that the convicts' only hope was to admit that they were degraded sinners, rather than see things through the convicts' eyes and feel what it meant to be a social outcast. The prisoners sometimes expressed

repentance—at risk of being scorned by their fellow-prisoners for 'giving in'—but usually this was to achieve a lesser penalty or a quicker release.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 8** has accounts of worship and of the role and effects of religion on the Peninsula. **Profile 20** is about the first Port Arthur Chaplain, and **Profile 33** tells of a major religious dispute.

Industry

There for a purpose

Port Arthur was never intended simply as a prison for Van Diemen's Land's worst convicts. The convicts were to be used for a purpose: they were to labour for the benefit of the Colony. From the start Port Arthur was to be an industrial centre, covering its costs, it was hoped, by producing goods and providing services that were unavailable elsewhere.

Timber

Port Arthur was first of all a source of timber, badly needed for buildings, bridges and ships in the new Colony. Thick forests of enormous eucalypts, mostly stringy bark, blue gum and swamp gum, abounded near the settlement, and to the first administrators the timber supply must have seemed endless. In the early years, the first few months of nearly all prisoners' sentences—unless their health could not take it—were spent working in timber gangs.

A hard life

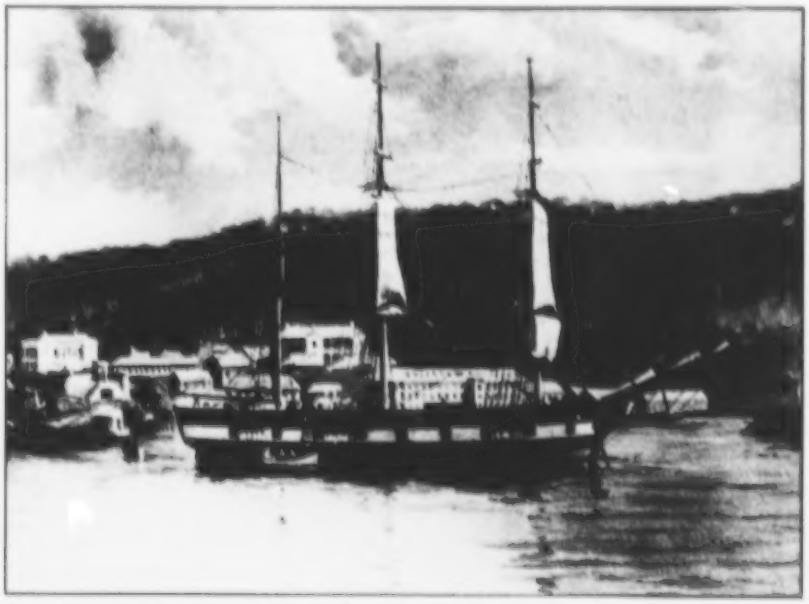
In Port Arthur's early years, timber-getting meant roughly trimming and cutting trees into lengths where the trees had fallen—at first, quite close to the settlement, but gradually farther away. A gang of fifteen or twenty convicts under an overseer would then carry or drag the log to the nearest sawpits. Next the carrying gang would hoist the cut timber beam onto shoulders and carry it to where it was needed, usually the dockyard or a building site. A vindictive overseer (usually himself a convict) could make life unbearable for members of the gang, or 'centipede': he could, for example, order them all to stand erect, which meant that the tallest men would bear the enormous weight.

Trees into timber

Timber was cut up at sawpits—trenches six feet (1.8 metres) deep and about fifteen feet (4.6 metres) long. The log was laid along the top of the trench and two men, one above and one in the pit below, cut along its length, each holding one end of a 'pitsaw'. It took about a day to cut the length of an average log, but as labour was plentiful many pits could be operated at any one time. The settlement's sawpits at first were located at two places: below the prisoners' barracks and at the dockyard. As nearby stands of timber were worked out, new pits were dug closer to new stands, and the sawn timber was carried by convicts to the settlement. (Bullock wagons were used in later years.)

Building and export

Timber was used at Port Arthur for building houses, barracks, offices, storage and work sheds, fences, furniture, boats and ships. It was also exported to Hobart Town in great quantities, mainly for public works. Between 1830 and 1844, 2.4 million super feet (5660 cubic metres) of timber left Port Arthur.



Ships

For a period around 1840 Port Arthur had one of the Colony's biggest shipbuilding, fitting-out and repairing yards. Some large ships—up to 250 tons—were built at the settlement, including the barques *Fanny*, *Wallaby* and *Lady Franklin*, and such vessels as whale-boats, steamboats and tugs. Some private whalers were amongst the ships repaired there. The dockyard included sawpits, a blacksmith's shop and a large sail loft.

Wood products

Other timber products of Port Arthur included roof shingles and plastering laths, barrels, brooms and charcoal.

Bricks

Port Arthur was also one of the Colony's major brick-making centres. Clay was dug from the hill north of the Church and from a place near Opossum Bay (now Carnarvon Bay). The clay was mixed with water, stirred or 'puddled', moulded, and fired in nearby kilns. Drain bricks, pipes, roofing and guttering tiles, and pots also were made from Port Arthur clay. The settlement also had sandstone and bluestone quarries.

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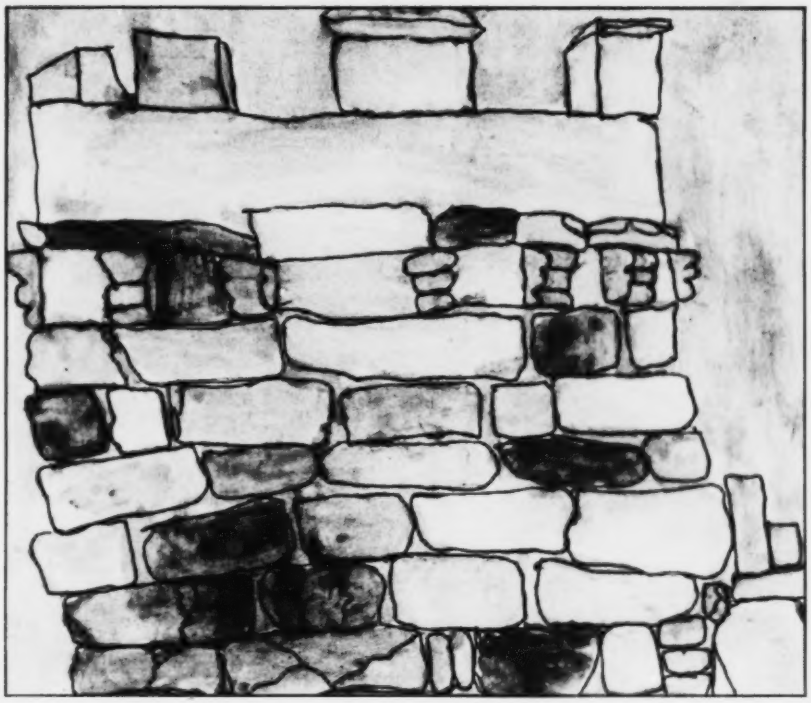

Flour

In the late 1840s wheat was ground into flour by means of a mill driven by channelled water and convicts on a tread-wheel. The granary, which produced up to 18 bushels, or 650 litres, of flour in an hour, was the building that was later converted to a penitentiary. It was said at the time to be the largest building in Australia. The flour was exported to all parts of the Colony.

Made at Port Arthur

Port Arthur convicts produced a number of other things, many of them for export. Products included boots, woven baskets and mats, cast and wrought iron (including nails, door hinges and bolts, and church-bells), bound books, salt from sea-water at Garden Point, soap, clothes, tanned hides, tin plating and cart-wheels.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 6** has 19th-century descriptions of convicts at work. **Eyewitness 1** describes shipbuilding at Port Arthur, and **Eyewitness 11** and **12** describe other industrial activities.

Escape

A regular affair

The natural impulse of any tied or caged animal is to attempt to escape. Escape from custody, or 'absconding' as the official records put it, was quite a regular affair at Port Arthur and at other Peninsula stations throughout the period of convict settlement.

The escape habit

Convict records are full of reports about attempts to abscond. With some prisoners it appears to have been almost a habit. All who were recaptured—and that meant nearly all who attempted escape—were severely punished with the lash, solitary confinement or hard labour. Attempting to escape was looked upon as a very serious offence, and convicts guilty of repeated attempts faced life sentences or even death by hanging. 'Nothing but the severest measures can operate on the minds of these men [escapees] with good effect,' noted Commandant Booth in his diary.

Brief freedom

Attempts to abscond ranged from 'going missing' for an hour or two, to well-planned attempts to escape permanently from the Peninsula. Brief moments of freedom could be obtained by pretending to be lost while on a work party in thick bush. Usually, convicts either returned before an alarm was raised or found after a few hours that they were ill prepared for a successful escape and surrendered to the nearest guard.

Mass breakout

In an incident in the late 1840s as many as sixty-eight prisoners working in a stone quarry near Port Arthur were reported to have disarmed their sentries and absconded into the bush. By his own account, the Chief Constable, John Evenden, used information from a convict informer to contact the group, whose leader told him that before the escape they had been abused by their overseer and threatened with 'fifty or a hundred lashes' each. The men agreed to surrender themselves, and in this rare case were not punished, while their abusive overseer, not a convict, was dismissed from his position.

Success

Sometimes attempts to escape were more serious. Death by starvation or exposure to cold was occasionally the fate of anyone who persisted. Some escapees were more successful. The best known incident, involving Martin Cash, Lawrence Kavanagh and George Jones, was carefully planned, and happened soon after an unsuccessful attempt in which Martin Cash was caught near Dunalley (then East Bay Neck). The three convicts secretly put aside food for several days before the escape, and on Boxing Day 1842 ran from a quarrying gang into the bush, where they hid for three days while the semaphore spread the news and the early alarm died down. They bypassed the line of dogs by swimming across

Eaglehawk Bay at night, losing their clothes in the water. (They quickly obtained more from a road gang's hut.) Later they had to carefully time their crossing of East Bay Neck to avoid guards. They roamed the Colony for about six months before being recaptured.

Escape by water

The sea offered another escape route. Many attempts were pathetic failures, with convicts using makeshift vessels, secretly constructed, which sank or capsized, usually drowning their occupants. (Few people could swim in the early 19th century.) Some attempts, however, involved expert seamen such as the eight men who stole the Commandant's boat in broad daylight in February 1839. After sailing and rowing the boat at least as far as Port Davey, the group, led by a former sailor named Thomas Walker, managed to double back up the East Coast and cross Bass Strait. Their luck finally deserted them at Twofold Bay, a whaling station near what is now Eden, New South Wales, where the crew of a government cutter took them into custody.

An ideal prison

Two factors—the natural sea barriers of the Peninsula and an efficient organisation which included the Eaglehawk Neck military station and the rapid semaphore system—made Port Arthur almost the ideal prison. The line of dogs across the Neck was strengthened by Booth in 1834. Dogs were chained close together—the line was even taken into the water by placing dogs on pontoons—and were trained to trust virtually no one. A military guard kept constant watch on either side of the Neck to effectively seal for all but the most resourceful of men the only possible land escape route.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Background 5** and **Eyewitness 5** tell of some of the consequences of escape. **Background 10** contains an account of an operation on the arm of a captured absconder. **Profiles 7, 11, 15, 17** and **22** include stories about escape. **Eyewitness 14** and **17** refer to Eaglehawk Neck, 'the key to the peninsula'. **Eyewitness 10** contains two escape stories.

Private lives

A town of men

The first thing to be said about Port Arthur society was that it was male-dominated. In the whole population, convict and free, there was only one female person (woman or girl) for every thirty or forty males. Even among the ten per cent or so who were not convicts, women or girls made up only about one-fifth, or one for every four men or boys.

Servants

Of the fifty or so females at Port Arthur at any one time, around four or five were convict women assigned as domestic servants. Male convicts with good records were also employed by officers for domestic duties. If they were educated they sometimes acted as tutors for officers' children; if not they performed more humble household tasks. Such servants were trusted enough to sleep in the houses in which they worked. On one or two occasions a talented convict was known to have performed theatrical acts for an audience of private officials and their families.

Convict contamination

The human degradation of the convict system could be disguised from private families, but its influence could never be eliminated. Officials' wives and their children were kept separate as far as possible, but the settlement was small and prisoners' activities could not have escaped their notice. When free people gossiped, they usually talked eventually about escapes, murders, punishments and other titillating bits of convict information—that is, when they were not talking about the problem of lazy or drunken servants or the inevitable little scandals amongst their own kind. Contact between prisoners and the families of officers was

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against regulations, although at least one wife was charitable enough to sneak tobacco to working prisoners by dropping it from her skirt as she passed them.

Uplifting

Some people attempted to 'raise the tone' of Port Arthur society by introducing such uplifting activities as the Port Arthur Philosophical Society or the Port Arthur Museum of Natural History—both initiatives of Thomas Lempriere, for many years a senior clerical officer. Lempriere and Booth and their families often got together for 'soirees', or evenings of music, intellectual discussions or parlour games, as did other officers' families. Booth was a competent guitarist and Lempriere played the piano. Another of Lempriere's accomplishments was painting in oils. He painted portraits (now in the Tasmanian Museum in Hobart) of both Booth and his wife Charlotte and once used his talents to paint a coiled snake on the seat of a fellow-officer's boat, frightening the man out of his wits, as Booth recorded.

Outdoors

On a fine day Port Arthur's residents loved to go outdoors. Often on Saturdays or holidays all off-duty officers—military and civil—and their families would turn out for a picnic with horse-racing, fishing and other active outdoor pastimes. On one such occasion in the 1830s some enterprising convicts trusted with fishing in a whale-boat off Safety Cove beach made an escape by sea. Game was plentiful in the bush, including wallaby, wombat and the occasional thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger, and soldiers and civil officers alike enjoyed the 'manly' pursuit of hunting. Christenings of babies were occasions for dressing up and enjoying a Sunday luncheon.

A garden's delights

Gardens played an important role in leisure activities for Port Arthur's free population. Officers who had their own gardens cultivated flowers

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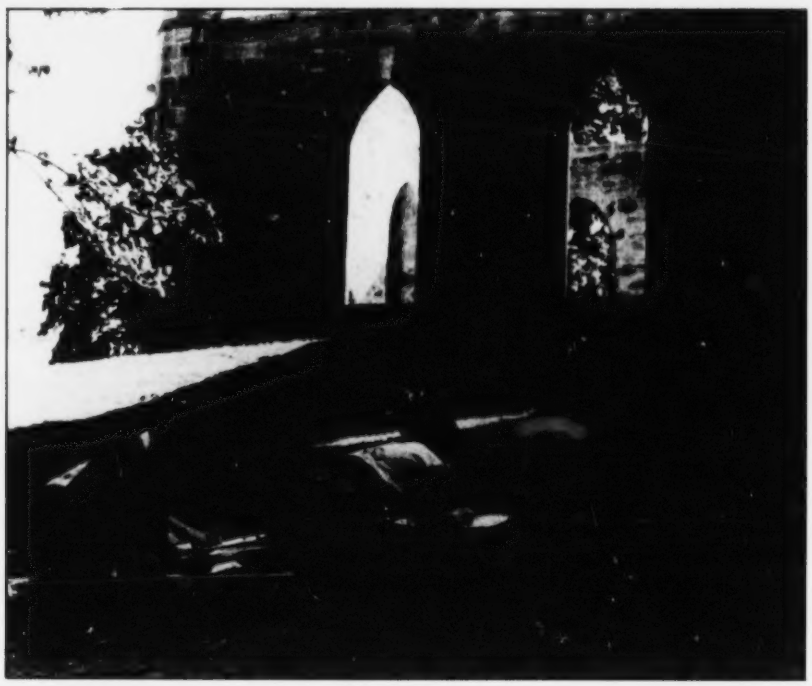
and fruit trees—Booth and his wife were both keen gardeners, as were some of the lesser officers and their wives. Another horticulturally inspired pleasure was a stroll through a neatly manicured ornamental plot, a favourite leisure activity, especially for couples. From the early 1850s, the gardens below the Government Cottage offered a fine venue for such wanderings.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Background 3** and **Eyewitness 4** describe Port Arthur in its early years. See **Eyewitness 7** and **16** for contemporary accounts about the non-convict way of life, and **Eyewitness 18** for the private life of a privileged convict. Also **Profiles 3, 9, 13, 20, 23, 24** and **31**, all about free officials or their wives.



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BACKGROUND 10

Health, sickness and death

Fit workers

Port Arthur was intended to be not just a prison, but a productive one (see Background 7). Because convicts were to be workers, they needed to be kept healthy and able-bodied. So their physical health was important to the administration.

Diet

Food, clothing and shelter are the most obvious requirements of a healthy person. After the first few years, Port Arthur was not generally short of food, so convicts usually had enough to eat. A typical 'good conduct' prisoner's diet was:

- ***for breakfast***—½ pound (220 grams) bread, 1½ pints (0.8 litres) gruel, 1 pint (0.5 litres) tea;
- ***for dinner***—½ pound bread, 12 ounces (400 grams) salt beef or 6 ounces salt pork, 1½ pints soup made with specified quantities of beef, vegetables and flour;
- ***for supper***—1½ pints gruel, ½ pound bread, 1 pint tea.

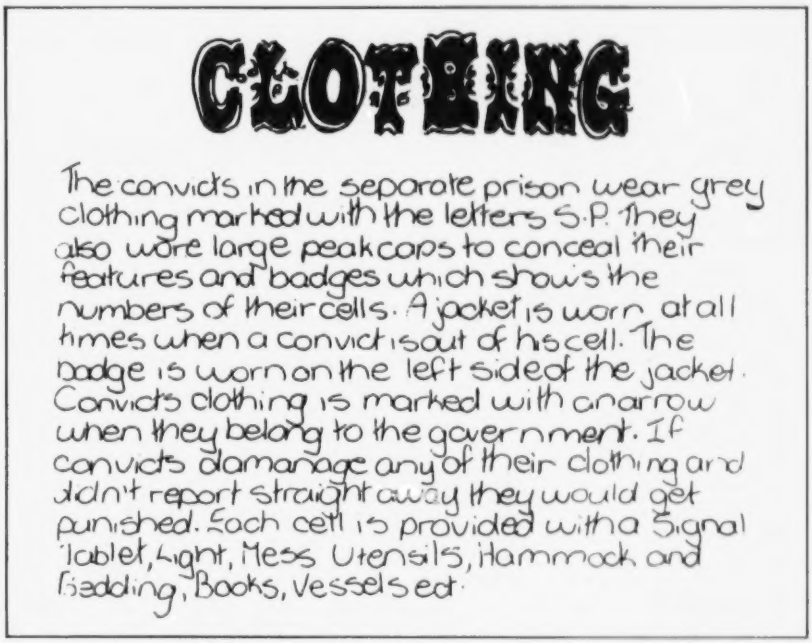
Extra food was allowed on Sundays.

Scurvy

The quality of the food, however, was not always up to standard, though it improved over the years. For example, scurvy—a disease causing swollen gums and skin rashes and resulting from lack of vitamin C—was a common complaint until prisoners began to be regularly fed fresh vegetables in the late 1830s.

Clothes

Standards of clothing, shelter and hygiene varied, but were usually adequate for the period. Undershirts and 'magpie suits'—yellow-and-black woollen jackets and trousers, replacing the early drab grey uniform which was such good camouflage for absconders—were common prisoners' garb, but were not always in good repair. The same applied to sleeping quarters. Until the conversion of the granary into a penitentiary in 1857, a typical prisoner slept on boards in a drafty, crowded timber dormitory, with his ticking (mattress cover) filled with straw and with whatever he could find for comfort, and with a blanket above him.


CLOTHING
The convicts in the separate prison wear grey clothing marked with the letters S.P. They also wore large peak caps to conceal their features and badges which shows the numbers of their cells. A jacket is worn at all times when a convict is out of his cell. The badge is worn on the left side of the jacket. Convicts clothing is marked with an arrow when they belong to the government. If convicts damanage any of their clothing and didn't report straight away they would get punished. Each cell is provided with a Signal Tablet, Light, Mess Utensils, Hammock and Bedding, Books, Vessels ect.

Waste

Disposal of waste was a constant problem. Lavatories were pits or buckets (officials had their own outhouse privies which were regularly cleaned out by convicts). Although sanitation was not good by today's standards, it was quite acceptable in the standards of 19th-century Van Diemen's Land. To keep themselves clean, prisoners were supposed to receive half a pound of soap daily.

Mental health

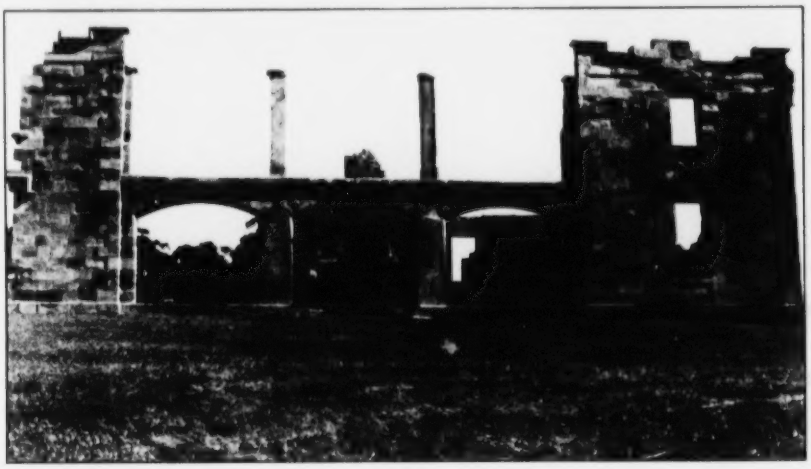
By the standards of the time and except for when they were punished, prisoners were physically well cared for, but their mental health was another matter (see Background 5).

Sickness and accidents

Sickness was common, at times even widespread. Respiratory infections like colds, pneumonia and consumption (or tuberculosis) were recurring illnesses. A high accident rate in the hazardous working conditions—particularly in timber-getting—added to the hospital cases. There was little understanding of how disease developed or how to prevent infection from spreading. (Sterilising was not standard practice.)

Hospital facilities

From 1832 a qualified surgeon (Thomas Brownell) lived at Port Arthur, but had to work in wretched conditions, often with no bandages or ointments. His predecessor, an unqualified convict who acted as 'hospital overseer' and whose name was Henry Harrington, used rough knives and darning needles as instruments. A new brick hospital (its ruins still dominate the hillside) was built in the early 1840s, but hygiene was often a matter of dispute—a waste-drainage pit near the hospital, for example, gave off 'a terrible smell', and lice infestations occurred at intervals.



Amputation

An operation on the arm of an absconder named Howard, shot while trying to avoid capture, is described thus by Commandant Booth (and remember there were no anaesthetics until the late 1840s):

> Casey (the doctor) considered that amputation was indispensable … After Casey told (Howard), that the operation was performed for his own benefit, he appeared quite reconciled. The arm was taken out of the socket … performed by Casey in about 10 minutes. The patient underwent the operation most manfully and is doing well. Feel no doubt that this example will act as a check for a little time. Nothing but the severest measures can operate on the Minds of these men with good effect.

Death

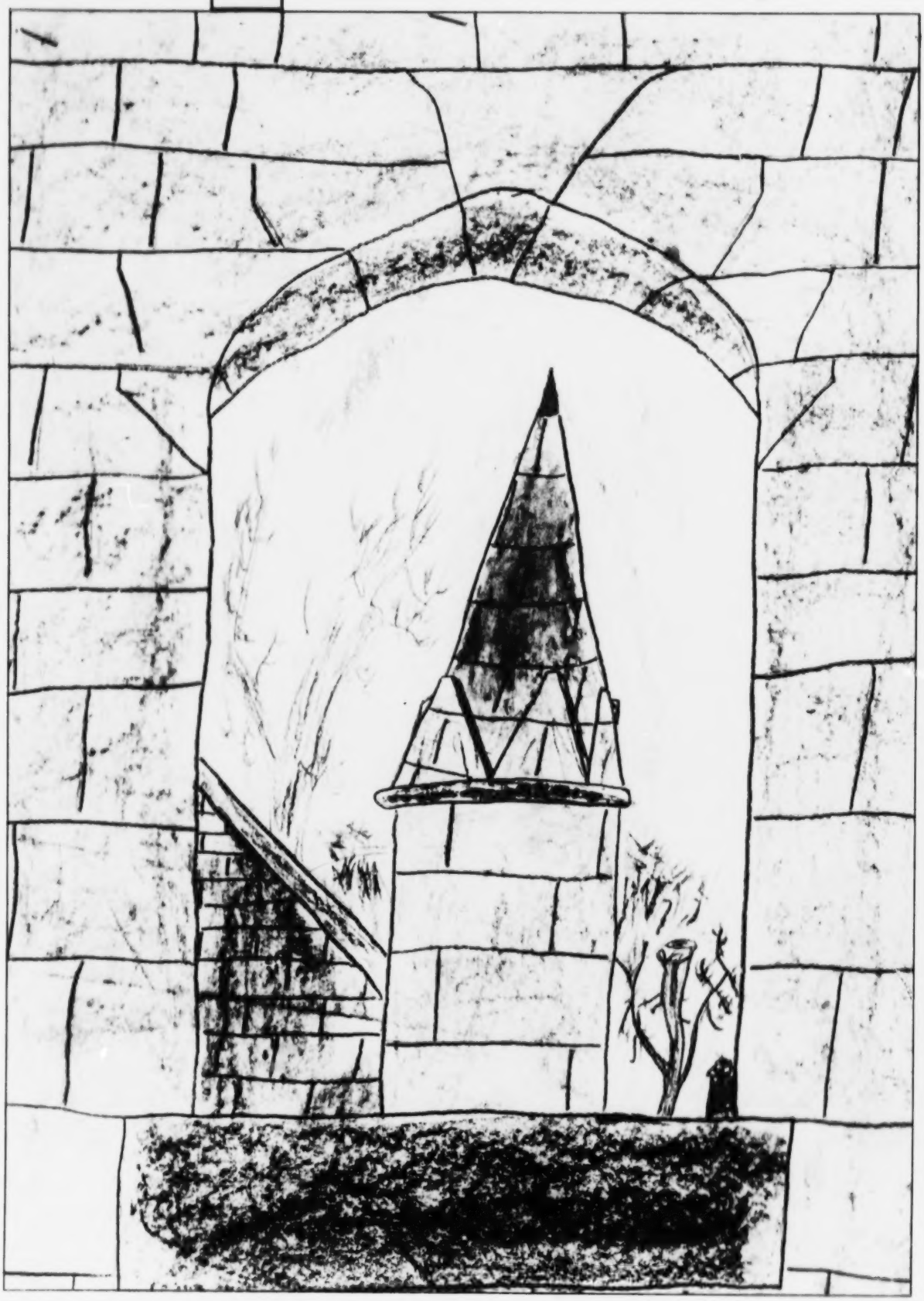
Deaths were frequent, and Dead Island, or Isle of the Dead, was set aside from the very early years as the settlement's graveyard. Civil and military officers and families were given a full funeral service and buried in marked graves: there were about 180 such burials. But convicts had different treatment. Their bodies were dissected by the surgeon at the hospital morgue as a routine matter to establish or confirm the cause of death. The rest of the process is described by a convict clerical assistant.

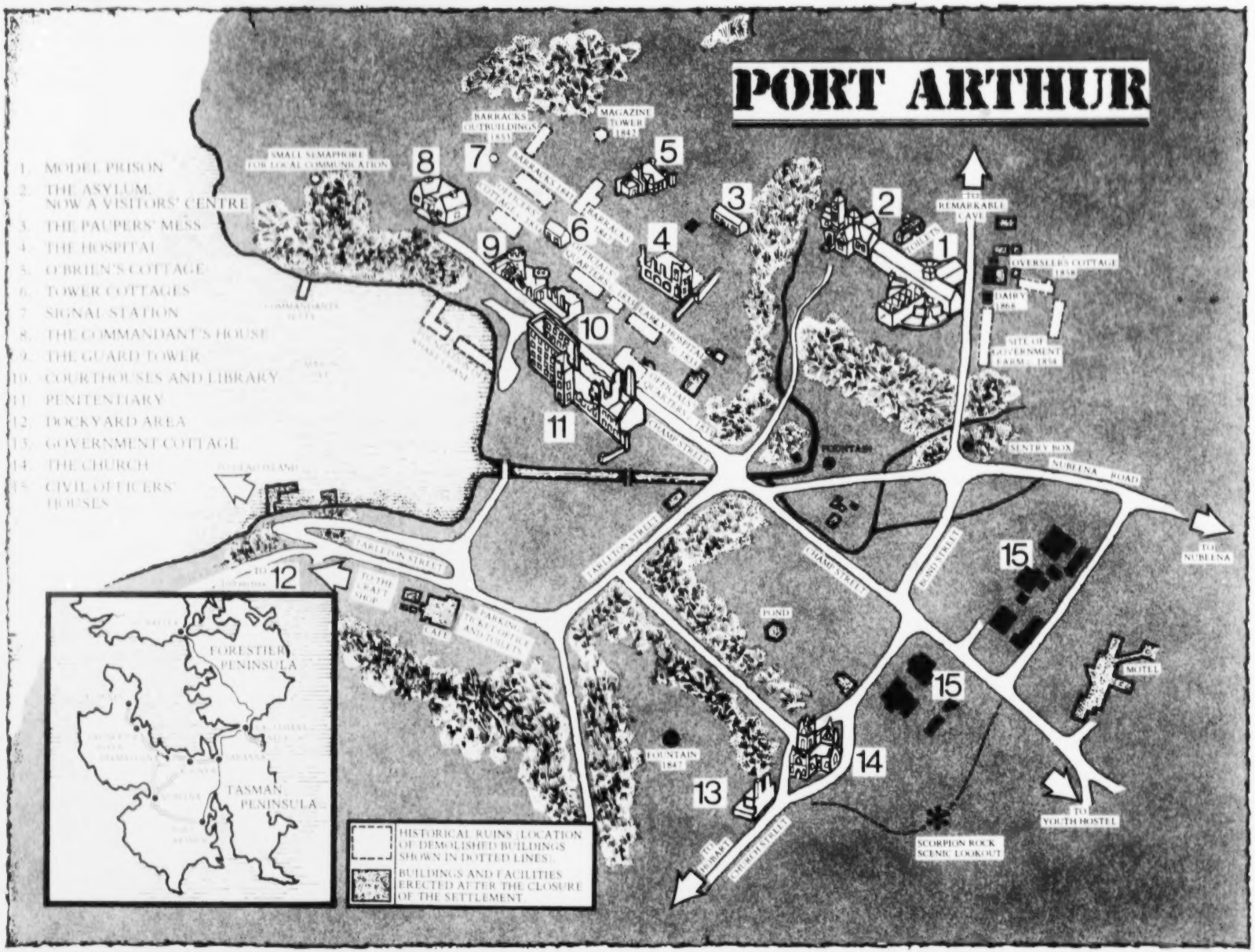
> A dead prisoner's corpse was put into a rough coffin in a state of perfect nudity, carried to the wharf by four men, placed in a boat, and amid the jeers and curses of the boatmen, conveyed to the landing place at the Isle of the Dead. Here it is left until the clergyman arrives, when it is borne to the grave.

Convicts were buried in common, unmarked graves up to six bodies deep. Unfilled graves were covered with lime until another death. About 1770 convicts are buried on Dead Island.

LOOKING FURTHER: **Eyewitness 13** has stories about the treatment of illness, and death. **Profile 24** tells about a prominent early medical officer, and **Profiles 2, 22** and **26** are about convicts who suffered illness.

BACKGROUND




PORT ARTHUR
1. MODEL PRISON
2. THE ASYLUM NOW A VISITORS' CENTRE
3. THE PAUPERS' MESS
4. THE HOSPITAL
5. O'BRIEN'S COTTAGE
6. TOWER COTTAGES
7. SIGNAL STATION
8. THE COMMANDANT'S HOUSE
9. THE GUARD TOWER
10. COURTHOUSES AND LIBRARY
11. PENITENTIARY
12. DOCKYARD AREA
13. GOVERNMENT COTTAGE
14. THE CHURCH
15. CIVIL OFFICERS' HOUSES
BARRACKS (OUTBUILDINGS)
MAGAZINE TOWER 1843
SMALE SEMAPHORE FOR LOCAL COMMUNICATION
REMARKABLE CAVE
OVERSEERS COTTAGE 1856
DAIRY 1868
SITE OF GOVERNMENT FARM 1854
FOUNTAIN
SENTRY BOX
SUBLENA ROAD
TO SUBLENA
EAGLEHAWK NECK
TO THE EAST COAST
CAFE
PARKING, TICKET OFFICE AND TOILETS
CHAPEL STREET
POND
MOTEL
FOUNTAIN 1847
SCORPION ROCK SCENIC LOOKOUT
TO YOUTH HOSTEL
TO HOBART
CHURCH STREET
FORESTIER PENINSULA
TASMAN PENINSULA
HISTORICAL RUINS (LOCATION OF DEMOLISHED BUILDINGS SHOWN IN DOTTED LINES)
BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES ERECTED AFTER THE CLOSURE OF THE SETTLEMENT